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Martha Washington Goes to War #1 cover art by Dave Gibbons

MARTHA WASHINGTON GOES TO WAR™

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Written by:

Frank Miller (*Sin City, Spawn/Batman*)

Illustrated by:

Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen, 1963*)

Color by:

Angus McKie

Color cover by:

Dave Gibbons

Advisory: Suggested for mature readers.

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LEGEND™

MARTHA WASHINGTON GOES TO WAR #1 (OF 5)

It's afternoon in America. Do you know where your freedom is? The year is 2014 and the second American civil war is in full swing. Martha Washington is back, nineteen years old and fighting against the outlaw Fat Boy Burger Corporation in the badlands of New Mexico. She's seen a lot of killing, but never a ghost. Until now. *Martha Washington Goes to War* is the exciting follow-up to *Give Me Liberty*.

A CONVERSATION WITH...

FRANK MILLER ★ DAVE GIBBONS

By Bob Sodaro

Together again! Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons are back with *Martha Washington Goes to War*, the eagerly anticipated sequel to their award-winning series *Give Me Liberty*. Comics journalist Bob Sodaro recently spoke with Frank and Dave about everyone's favorite soldier, Martha. Here's their conversation.

Bob Sodaro: *Frank, you have a special fondness for Martha as I recall. Why is that, beside the fact that she's your character?*

Frank Miller: Well something happened between Dave and I working on this character. Dave and I have such a good collaboration, and we both did our share of work on her. I would work on her as a writer, and we went through visual after visual sketching her out time and again, until she clicked. We just felt the simplicity of her character really made her stand out, and that something emerged that was really right.

BS: *Dave, what's it like to be working with Frank on the Martha Washington character again?*

Dave Gibbons: It's nice to be back with Martha. It's been maybe a year-and-a-half, or two years since I drew [*Give Me Liberty*]. She's a really nice character. There is something about her — the way Frank writes it — that makes it a pleasure to draw, and be involved with again. In the past year or so, I've done more writing than drawing. It's great to be back at the drawing board, with a pile of really good scripts in front of me.

BS: *Why did you take such a long break between* Martha *stories?*

DG: The way that Frank and I set Martha up is that it works very well with the center of the story to have some breaks. The way we always wanted to do it is to have it as our background thing, where our other commitments didn't press. Martha, we hope, is going to lead a very long, and very interesting life. At the moment we've only taken her up to the age of 19. It's very nice to have a leisurely pace at which to do it. Each time we bring it back to rejuvenate it, we make it so that new readers can start quite easily, and hopefully be interested that there is a back-story to all this. I think it's interesting that this hasn't been done in comics before. Characters have been dropped and then revived in different versions. Obviously, there are long ongoing sagas like Marvel comics, which are essentially stories of people's lives told at some length. To be able to do it and pick our moment, and show the key points to this particularly interesting woman's life, is something that hasn't been done before. We could move on in time in between the books. When you meet Martha at the beginning of this series, she's three years older than the last time you saw her. Things change. The situation she finds herself in is different. Her personality has changed, as happens to all people. That's a very interesting challenge. It's nice to do things that way, rather than saying, 'Right, we're gonna sit down, and we're gonna do 500 pages of this woman's life, starting now, and running the next three years.' I think it keeps it fresh. I like to do it that way, and I think Frank does as well. It leaves you time to do other projects, and be involved in other things along the way.

FM: We're definitely moving things forward. It's nothing like a recap. In a lot of ways, it's a different series from the first one. In the first one it was incumbent upon us to portray the entire world — or the entire country — that Martha lived in. Now that we have drawn all the maps and named all the parties, we can move on with events through her at a much faster pace. I know there have been people who have been waiting for her to come back. I think we're re-introducing her. We're hoping that we can capture people who remember giving her a read. We're also hoping that we can introduce a bunch of new people to her. My hope in the future is to have a *Martha Washington* series out every year.

BS: *What are the differences between* Give Me Liberty *and* Martha Washington Goes to War*?*

FM: There's a difference in continuity, in that she's older, and things are happening very fast in the world. It's a different landscape. Remember, *Give Me Liberty* started essentially next year. She was born in 1995. We've now moved nearly 20 years later in time. Technological progress and confusion has gotten much, much greater. The main difference, I'd say, to the reader would be, this is a much more straightforward adventure story. It covers a shorter span of time, and she is a soldier on a mission. She goes through a great many changes in this. As a read, this one is more a 'Fasten your safety belts' kind of stuff. This series will leave her pursuing a very different course than when the series started, but I don't want to blow it.

Bob: *Now what was the reason for making —well she is 19 now, but when we first met her she was 16 — what was the reasoning behind making the main character a 16-year-old girl?*

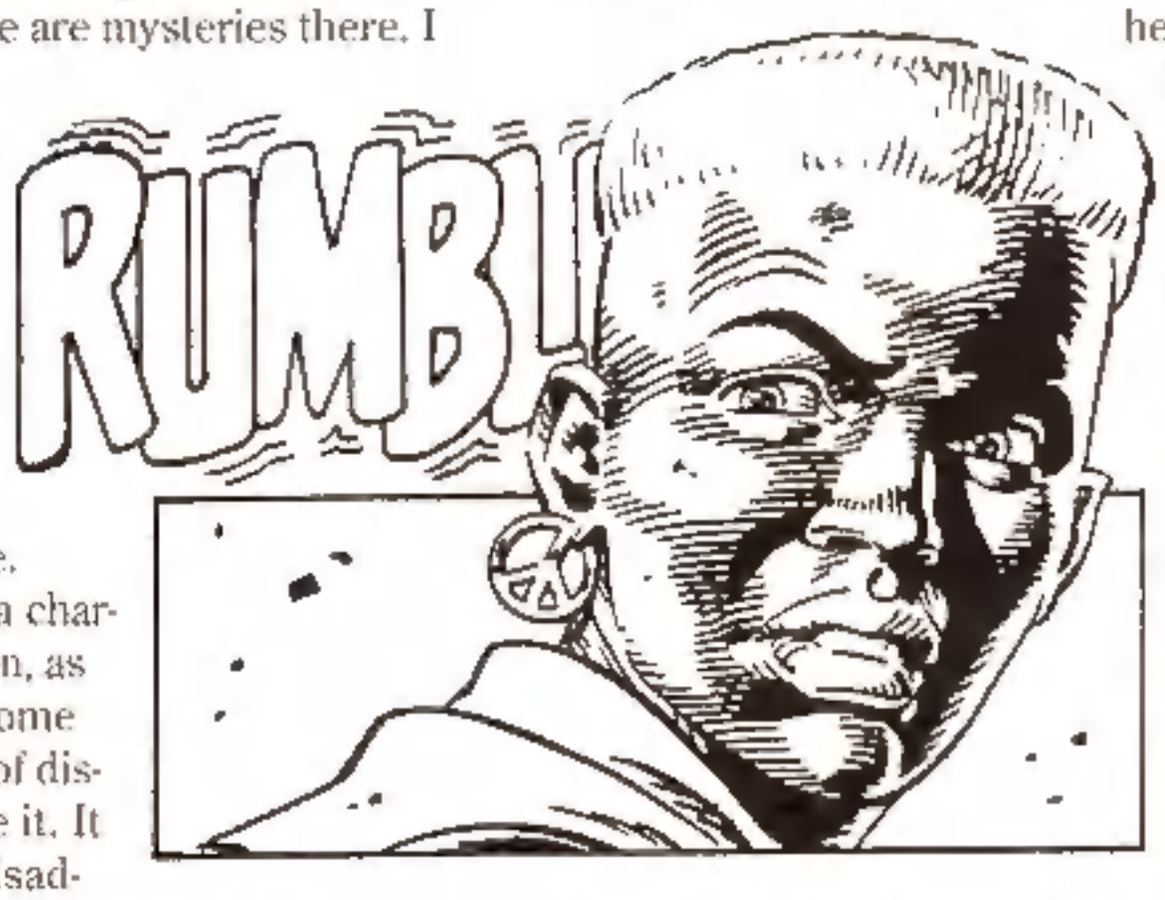
FM: Well actually when we first met her she was exactly zero years old because she was being born. The Martha Washington project in totality is designed to tell the entire story of her life.

BS: *Do you think it's presumptuous of you to write a female character like Martha Washington?*

FM: [Laughter] Especially an impoverished black female.

BS: *Especially. What do you know about being impoverished, black, and female?*

FM: Get Dave in on this too. A couple of middle-class white guys, writing about a black, impoverished heroine. I think the whole point is that Washington is a human being. If I couldn't attempt to write a character like this, all I would write is rather boring stories about people like me. I've written about people who could fly. Human experience is universally felt emotions that bind us together as people. I can imagine what certain things are like. I certainly know what certain disadvantaged situations are like. I think that it would be extremely bigoted of me to say, 'Oh, I can't write that character, it's black and they think different. They experience things different.' As far as, of course, writing a woman, there are mysteries there. I can't crawl inside a woman's head and be her. I think while there are differences between men and women, both are human. Both feel shame, compassion, horror, and both know what it's like to overcome obstacles.



DG: Well Frank came up with the character, but it's all the same to me. What we wanted to do was create a character who was one of the downtrodden, as it were. That's what heroism is, to come from a position of, if not weakness, of disadvantage anyway, and to rise above it. It would seem that to be black is a disadvantage, and to be a black woman is even more of a disadvantage. I mean that is a fact. It obviously shouldn't be that way, but that's a fact. In my mind that's what makes it particularly interesting — that she has started with a lot of disadvantages. Besides that she hasn't exactly got aspirations, but she's not daunted or even thinks about the disadvantages that she started with. She really lives her life in the best way she can, which is a heroism of a more truthful and a more heroic kind.

FM: If you look at my track record, I have done a lot of female characters. The first original character that I created as a professional is Elektra. In my *Ronin* series, even though she wasn't the title character, Casey McKenna was a very important one. In some ways I think of her as a dry-run for Martha. I have been acutely aware of the lack of female characters in comics and wanted to do my bit to introduce them. Specifically in the case of Martha, the very first notions I had were that I wanted an ultimately American hero. Part of what is essentially American historically is being able to come from very little and gain a great deal. The Horatio Alger story. So I admittedly stacked the deck against her every which way: impoverished, black, female. She had every mark against her and the virtue of the character is that she doesn't think of herself as a victim, nor live as one.

BS: *You think that is very important, not to think of yourself as a victim?*

FM: Oh, absolutely. I think that the way our country is wallowing in self-pity now is unproductive, destructive, and kind of disgusting. These days everybody is a victim. It's just amazing.

BS: *Isn't Martha Washington a role model of sorts?*

FM: She is a really good hero. If there should be a secondary factor, of someone being inspired by that character, that's lovely. It's never my intention.

BS: *You said that Martha had everything going against her, but she didn't break down, she didn't whine, she didn't cry, she stood up, she took it, and she did what she was supposed to do. Isn't that what a role model should be?*

FM: My objection to the word role model is, it reflects my personal beliefs. That's what I'm doing. I don't have any interest in telling people how to vote, what God to worship, nothing. I can only reflect my own beliefs in my stories, whether my characters are heroes or not. If there is some secondary effect, where someone is affected, and feels like fighting a good fight or something, that's a wonderful thing. But to consciously sit down and say that you're going to instruct people is against everything I believe in, in fantasy and fiction. In fact, it's an insult for the reader. I think heroes are a very good thing. I think a hero's life is a prototype of what a well-led life would be. The only place I reject this role-model notion, is in saying that the fantasies involved are done in order to indoctrinate. It's not my job.

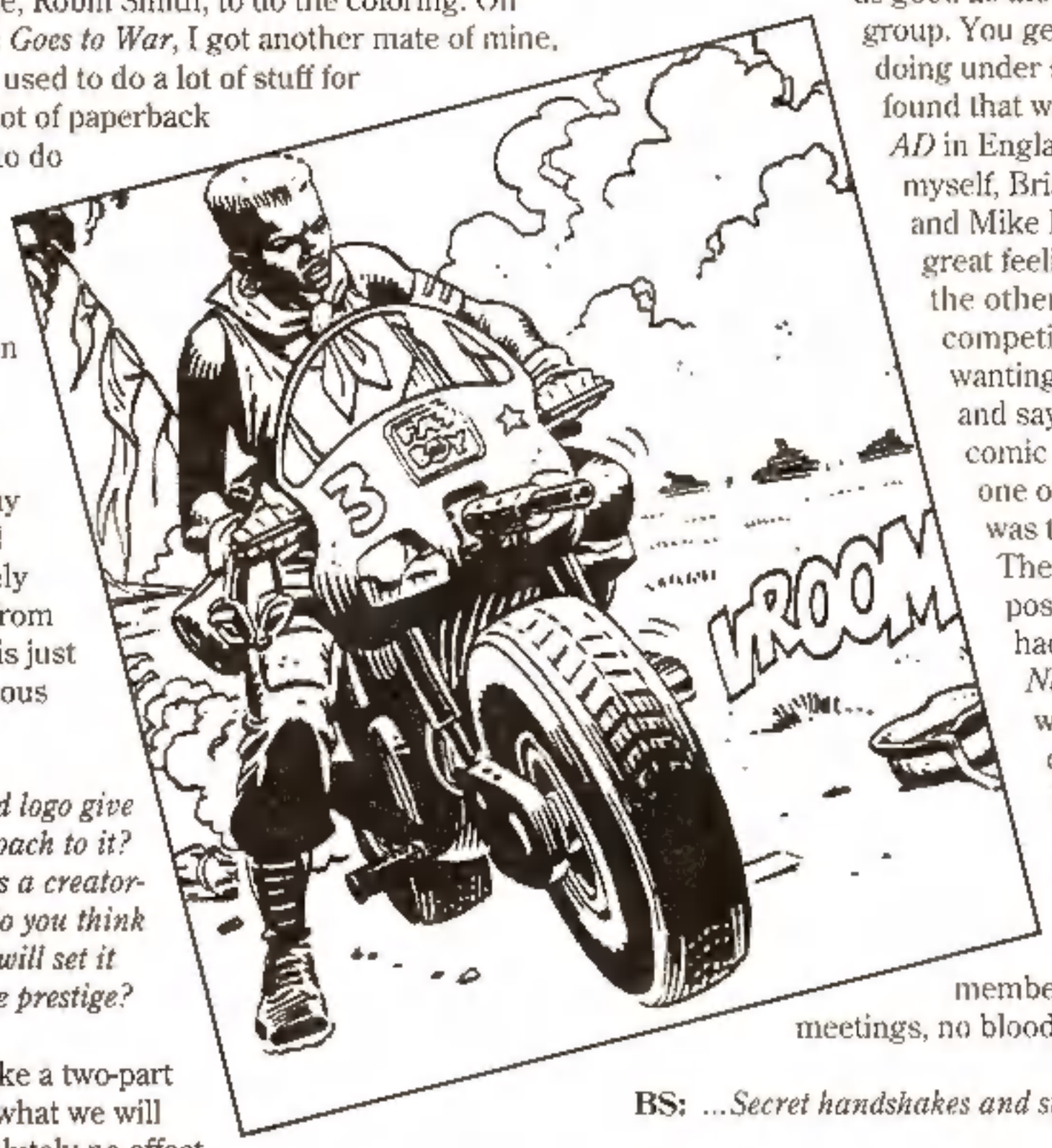
BS: *Dave, was it* your *intention to make Martha a role model, or is that incidental? You were saying that she has high moral qualities. Do you look at her as a role model? Sure she kills people, but she's a soldier, so it's okay to kill people if you're a soldier...*

DG: Oh, I didn't say it's okay to kill people if you're a soldier. She is a soldier. That's what soldiers do, and what society expects soldiers to do. We've got no particular message other than we tried to come up with a character who's somehow different. Someone who isn't a leering, over-driven kind of monster. She's basically a decent young woman.

BS: *The last time I noticed you were doing a 48-page prestige format and now you're doing a five-issue miniseries. Is there a reason for doing it this way? Will it be a square-bound graphic novel the next time? Are you doing different formats for the sake of doing different formats?*

FM: No, we're doing this one so that we can produce something that's a bit more affordable and is a bit more of an ongoing serial. I really like the pamphlet format, and to be honest, one of the reasons that I like it is because of the saddle-stitching. When you open it, it lays flat. If you look at some of the perfectbound books you lose some of the artwork in the curve of the page because of the binding. I like the format better, but mainly because it's cheaper. Everybody's felt the crunch, especially these days. We're hoping that at the lower price tag it will be accessible to a wider audience. We had a lot of complaints from fans who said they wanted the series, and a lot of them bought it anyway, but they really felt the pinch when it was five bucks apiece.

DG: It's going to come out monthly. On *Give Me Liberty*, I got an old friend of mine, Robin Smith, to do the coloring. On *Martha Washington Goes to War*, I got another mate of mine, Angus McKie, who used to do a lot of stuff for *Heavy Metal* and a lot of paperback cover illustrations, to do the coloring. What I am very excited about is that he's actually coloring the book on his Mac Quadra. I tell you, it looks absolutely great. It really exceeds all my expectations. In all modesty, completely distancing myself from all the line work, it is just going to be a gorgeous book to look at.



BS: *Does the Legend logo give you a different approach to it? I know it was always a creator-owned project, but do you think the Legend imprint will set it apart or give it more prestige?*

FM: That sounds like a two-part question. As far as what we will do, it will have absolutely no effect whatsoever. Martha is her own world. We don't interact with the other Legend titles at all, so in terms of what we're doing creatively, it won't make one whit of a difference, except to the extent that all the Legend guys tend to be faxing each other our artwork and working that much harder to show each other up.

BS: *Really?*

FM: Oh yeah, it's great. It's wonderful, I keep getting stuff from Art Adams or Mike Mignola, and it's beautiful stuff. So I just decided to draw all the spokes on the motorcycle I'm drawing. As far as how it will affect the sales, that's just something I wouldn't even attempt to guess. I hope that because of the imprint, people who like *Martha* will give *Hellboy* a try or who like *Hellboy* will give *Sin City* a try.

DG: I think it *does* make a difference to the way we do it. What happened is after *Watchmen*, *Dark Knight*, and one or two other books that were around then, a few of us found ourselves in a position that we felt inclined to do creator-owned books. This was at a time when it was so difficult to do that with the established companies. Some companies had business practices that weren't particularly endearing at the time. Although it must be said that I've never had any problems. Business is business and it never really caused me any great personal injury. A few of us decided to go out on our own, which was a great thing to do. It can get kind of lonely out there. One of the things about working for DC or Marvel is that you do feel part of a family, and they do treat you as such. There may be ulterior motives for that, but I think there is a genuine warmth to feel part of that, which you don't get when you're out there on your own. The other thing about it is when you're out there on your own and it's just you and your collaborator, you can sometimes feel that nobody really cares about you or nobody's watching. Does anybody but me and Frank really care about this? When you work with a group of other people, you're part of a larger group of comics you have a sense of. I suppose you could call it peer pressure. You have the desire to do work at least as good as the other people in your peer group. You get excited by what they're doing under similar circumstances. I found that when I was working on *2000 AD* in England — it was a group of myself, Brian Bolland, Kevin O'Neill, and Mike McMahon — there was a great feeling of, not wanting to out-do the other guys in an aggressively competitive way, but kind of not wanting to not let your side down and say, 'This is going to be a great comic and my strip is going to be one of the best things in it.' That was the thing that we missed. There were a few of us in this position. Obviously John Byrne had done a similar thing with *Next Men* and Mike Mignola was very keen to get out there on his own, and Paul Chadwick had been doing it for years anyway. It's a very subtle thing to feel that you're part of a group. There's no sort of official membership, there are no secret meetings, no blood oath sworn, or...

BS: *...Secret handshakes and stuff.*

DG: Well how did you hear about that? [Laughter] To feel that you're part of a group is actually a very positive thing, and again, it's really energized me, and made me feel, yeah, we've got something to stand for. That sounds a bit passionate. It's a quieter thing than that, but certainly to be in a group of people whose work I admire — and I would try and seek out anyway — is the thing that makes me feel a degree of pride, and hopefully that feeling is growing with peer pressure so that the pride comes out in the work.

BS: *You're not going to have an interactive universe where Martha is going to show up in* Next Men*?*

DG: No. When we had discussions about having a creator group this was one of the stumbling blocks. Many people felt we ought to have a shared universe, because the publishing wisdom at the time was to have a shared universe. This is how to ship comic books. One of the things about being a creator-owned book is that you do whatever you want to, and you don't really get yourself agreeing that

you're going to have somebody else's character guest-starring in your book whether it's appropriate or not. If it becomes appropriate, well fine. Nixon of *Hard Boiled* has turned up in *Martha*; in *Hard Boiled* there was a Pax advertisement in one of the pictures; Frank has drawn Martha and Marv together. That seems to be having fun. In the days when I was really hooked by superhero comics it was the unexpectedness of somebody turning up in someone else's book that I used to like, not the fact that now they know they're all going to show up eventually.

BS: *Frank, was there something else you wanted to say?*

FM: Yes, if you could just squeeze this in somewhere. Dave is doing stuff that is so beautiful it's blowing me away. It's the boldest work he's ever done. *Martha Washington Goes to War* is just crackling with energy. He's more fun than ever to work with. What I enjoy about collaborations is that you feed off each other. You push each other.

BS: *Dave, how far into working on* Martha *are you at this point?*

DG: I'm two issues into it.

BS: *Are you approaching the layout design of* Martha, *the artwork itself, any differently than you approached* Give Me Liberty*?*

Dave: Well, yes I am. I always feel the need to try and make each job I do look different from the one before. Obviously, with *Watchmen*, I imposed a very strict grid format on it, and made it look different from anything I've done before, and indeed anything else that was about. That was very quickly picked up by other people. That wasn't an original idea with me. The Europeans, and people like Steve Ditko, have been doing it for years. When I came to do *Give Me Liberty*, I wanted to do it in a much more free-form way. It's sort of a deluxe format that we could bleed off the page. Now when I think about things, I don't like the idea of bleeding off the page anymore. Except in very exceptional circumstances. I think it distinguishes a bit of a trick. Again, to fit in with the much more mainstream comic-book look that *Martha* has got this time, all the images are self-contained. We've hopefully done some interesting things with the design. I've been very inspired by a lot of things that are currently going down in comics. I think some of the hotter artists today do some really exciting page work. I've tried to get that kind of energy. Obviously, I've got my own way of telling a story. I think the values that I'm fond of in a story, probably aren't the ones that are echoed by the hot artists of today, by looking at their work. There's a whole different energy about comics now, which I've tried to bring to mark. Because I haven't drawn very much for a while, I've got this pent-up energy. The consensus is, with people who have seen what I've done, it is pretty lively.

BS: *Are you doing anything else besides* Martha *at the moment?*

DG: No. I haven't got any time at all to do anything else. The only thing that is kind of down the pike at the moment is the possibility of collaborating with Larry Niven. One of the things that I like doing is collaborating. It's great to collaborate with Frank; it's great to collaborate with Alan [Moore]; and the things I've written, I've been so lucky with the artists. Obviously I want to do more *Martha*.

Bob: *Have you ever had the desire to write and draw your own stuff? Or have you done that?*

...EVEN THEN, MY MOM STAYED CALM.
I KNOW YOU'RE SCARED, MARTHA BUT NOTHING'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOU.
YOU'RE GOING TO GROW UP STRONG. YOU'RE GOING TO BE GOOD FOR THIS WORLD. YOU'RE SPECIAL. YOU'RE BETTER THAN THIS PLACE.
WHEN THINGS GET BAD LIKE THIS, YOU JUST KEEP TELLING YOURSELF...
THIS WON'T KILL ME. I WON'T DIE HERE. THIS WON'T KILL ME.

DG: I've only ever done that in a very limited way. It obviously is the step to take, but as I said, I do so love collaborating with people, particularly when I get the chance to collaborate with people who are really good. I'd hate to let the script down, or conversely I'd hate to let the art down. I think that is an obvious step to take, and a few of the ideas that I'm kicking around are along those lines. I keep a notebook that I originally thought would have notes in it for one particular story, but as it grows, I realize there are maybe three completely disparate stories. It's a question of timing. To actually say 'Okay I'm not going to take up this chance to do a series with Frank, or Alan Moore, or Mike Mignola, or someone' and to actually say, 'Nope, I'm going to do it myself.' Then it refers back to that feeling of it can get lonely out there. I suppose I'm a big boy now and it's time I did, but I never believe in sorting things first. I always found that creator projects get to the point that they achieve critical mass, and then they happen. If it's a point where that does happen, well that's when I'll do it.

BS: *Frank, do you think it would be fun someday, since Dave has been writing, for Dave to write a comic book, and you to draw it?*

FM: That would be a kick sometime. I think one thing that will come from the Legend group is that you'll see a lot of interesting combinations down the road. A physical or social fact among comic-book artists that are in touch for a while is that they wind up working together.

BS: *Is that what you're doing for the foreseeable future,* Martha *and* Sin City*?*

FM: That's the main stuff that's on the plate right now. I want to keep going every year. That depends on Dave's life, as much as mine.

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